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ABSTRACT

A nationwide survey was conducted to solicit input from a random sample of junior and senior high school students (N=250) and teachers (N=258) regarding violence in the schools. This report presents a summary of survey results under five headings. The first, perceived seriousness of violence, indicated that one in three teachers and one in four students viewed violence in their schools a serious problem. The second, factors that influence behavior in school, revealed that teachers and students point to discipline in the home, student self-esteem, and peer acceptance as key factors. The third part, reasons for violence, showed that teachers and students cited the breakdown of the family and the prevalence of media violence, but that students placed more blame on peer influence, a factor most teacher rated very low. In the fourth section, solutions to violence, more than 80 percent of the teachers suggested classes for parents to improve parenting skills, smaller class sizes, stricter discipline, and family support services; students favored broader class choices, family support services, smaller class size, and student involvement in discipline problems. Finally, the section on responsibility for reducing violence, disclosed that most students placed responsibility for reducing violence on themselves and their parents; teachers felt that everyone was responsible for the task. Some results are provided in cross-tabulated data tables. (LL)

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ED 374 118

Keeping Our Schools Safe

A Survey of Teachers and Students About Violence in U.S. Schools

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"This critical survey by Honeywell finally provides the nation and its schools with badly needed hard information — rather than just rhetoric — about the extent of violence, its causes and workable solutions. A job well done."

Michael Casserly
Executive Director
Council of the Great City Schools

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INTRODUCTION

Each day we hear more and more about violence in schools, and concern for our children's safety grows. As parents, business people and community members, we do what comes naturally to use — we look to the "experts" for answers. We turn to school boards, government leaders, law enforcement officials — hoping they can solve this growing problem. But what about those on the front lines — the students and teachers who face this problem every day? Too often, in our haste to find a solution, we exclude them, the very people who are impacted most directly by the problem.

That's why Honeywell Inc. commissioned a nationwide survey of students and teachers about violence in schools. We wanted to solicit input from the people in the trenches. More than 500 students and teachers answered a variety of questions about the causes and impact of violence and offered solutions to this devastating problem.

We hired C.J. Olson Market Research, an independent firm, to develop the questionnaire, conduct phone interviews and interpret the data.

Honeywell is committed to forming partnerships and defining solutions to create safe, comfortable, productive and cost-effective learning environments. The company works with schools across the nation on a daily basis — more than 1,000 school districts to date — to help them improve their building infrastructure. Honeywell provides comprehensive, guaranteed building solutions that make schools safer and more energy efficient, saving them millions of dollars in the process.

We hope you find this information useful in the battle we all are waging together, working to solve the growing problem of violence among our youth.

Joseph M. George
Director
Schools, Colleges and Universities Business Unit
Honeywell Inc.

METHODOLOGY

Researchers conducted 508 phone interviews with junior and senior high school teachers and students representing a random sample of rural, suburban and urban districts across the country — 250 interviews with students and 258 with teachers. The listed sample, screened to include a high incidence of households with children under 18, was purchased from SDR, a professional sample firm.

The interview questions were developed together by Honeywell Inc. and an independent research firm, C.J. Olson Market Research. The questionnaire, which included both open- and closed-ended questions, was pretested with 20 respondents (10 students and 10 teachers) and revised before data collection began.

All interviewing was conducted by C.J. Olson Market Research in the spring of 1994. About 10 to 15 percent of the interviews were monitored to ensure consistent and high quality data collection. Completed questionnaires were then coded, the data entered and computer analyzed. The results were printed as cross-tabulated data tables, some of which are included in this report. (Note: the data tables include the top responses, but not necessarily all the responses.)

The survey's statistical reliability is 95 percent, plus or minus 4.5 percent.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

I. Perceived seriousness of violence

One in three teachers and one in four students surveyed consider violence in their schools a serious problem. The fact that the majority of surveyed students and teachers did not indicate violence was a serious problem surprised some experts.

"I anticipated that number to be much higher," said Michael Casserly, executive director of the Council of the Great City Schools, which represents the nation's largest urban school districts. "There is no doubt we have a problem, and we must take action now to curb it."

"Violence is everywhere today and is almost becoming part of our culture," said Noreen Nilan, student chairperson of the National Association of Student Councils Executive Board and a senior at Pomperaug High School in Southbury, Conn. "It's essential that everyone join the war against violence . . . everyone has a role to play."

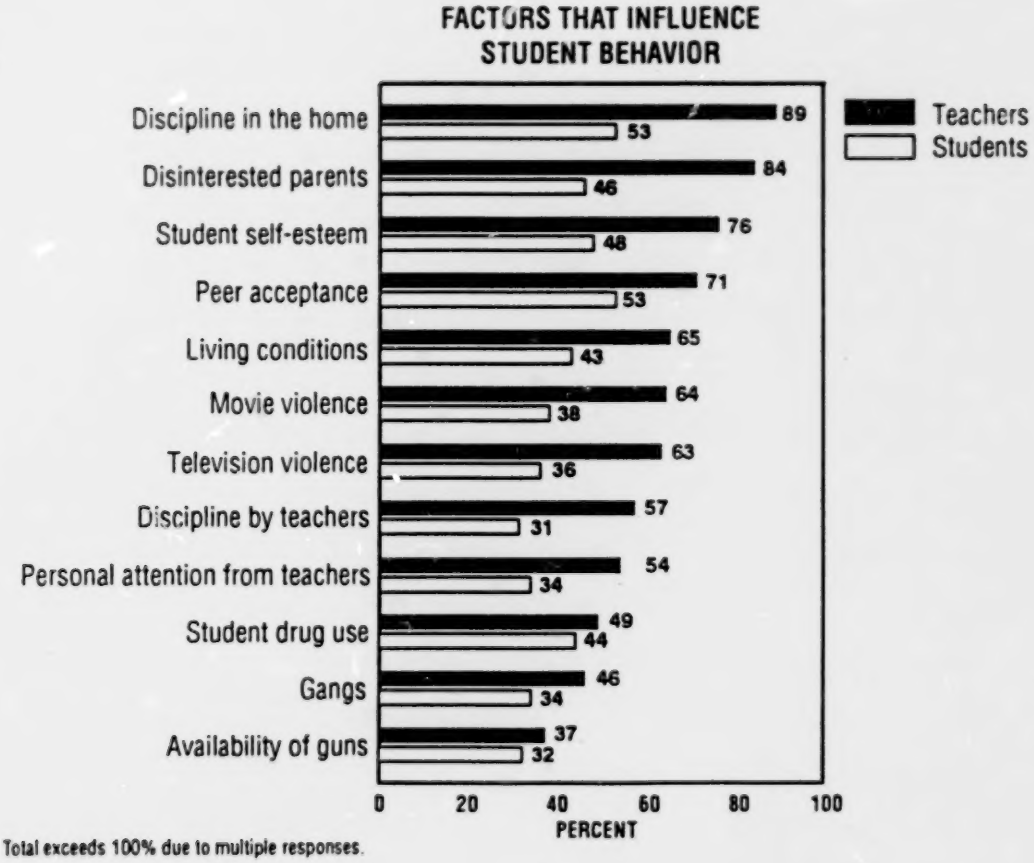
"I think the kids have to want to stop the violence."

– Surveyed student

II. Factors that influence behavior in school

Teachers and students generally agree on the factors that influence students' behavior in school. Both groups point repeatedly to discipline in the home as one of the most influential factors. In fact, teachers rated discipline in the home highest among 15 factors on the survey. Students rated it second.

In addition, both teachers and students placed student self-esteem and peer acceptance high on their lists of factors influencing student behavior.



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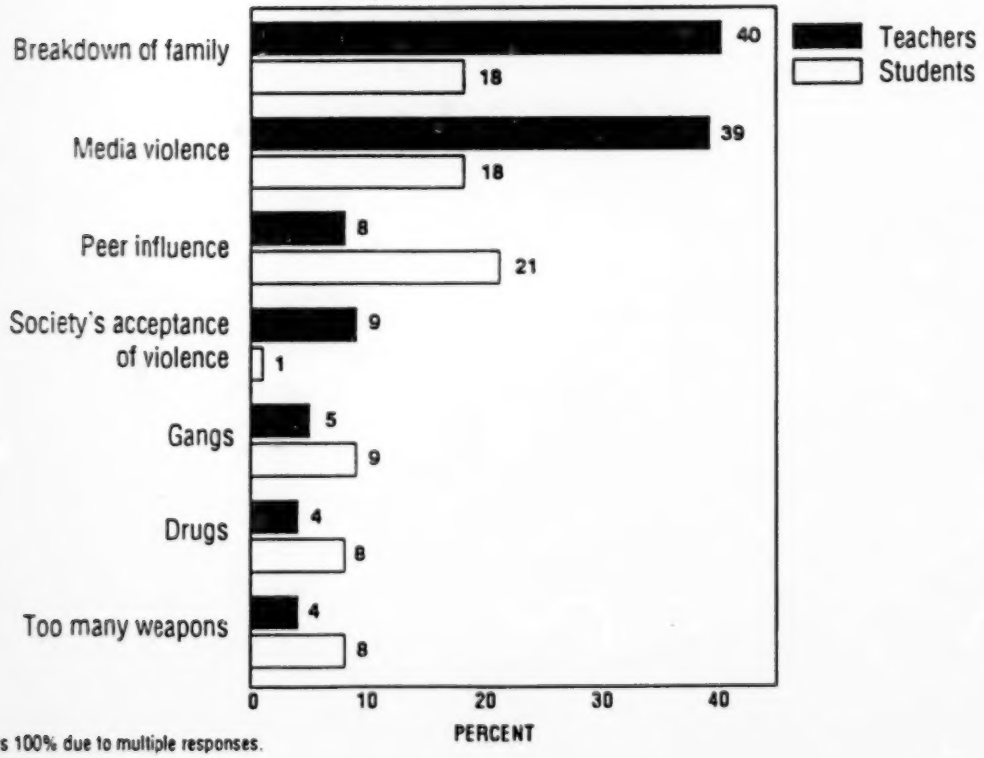
III. Reasons for violence

Teachers and students also generally agree about the reasons for violence among young people today, with one notable exception. Both groups cited the breakdown of the family and media violence as two of their top three reasons. But students place even more of the blame on peer influence, a factor most teachers rated very low.

"Sometimes, I think (violence) is the only way kids get recognized."

– Surveyed student

REASONS FOR SCHOOL VIOLENCE



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IV. Solutions to violence

Although teachers and students were in general agreement about the reasons for violence and the factors that influence student behavior, their suggestions for solutions to school violence varied widely. However, discipline, class sizes and family support were recurring themes for both groups.

More than 80 percent of the teachers surveyed said providing classes for parents to improve parenting skills would be the most effective solution. Also high on teachers' list of solutions were smaller class sizes, stricter discipline and family support services.

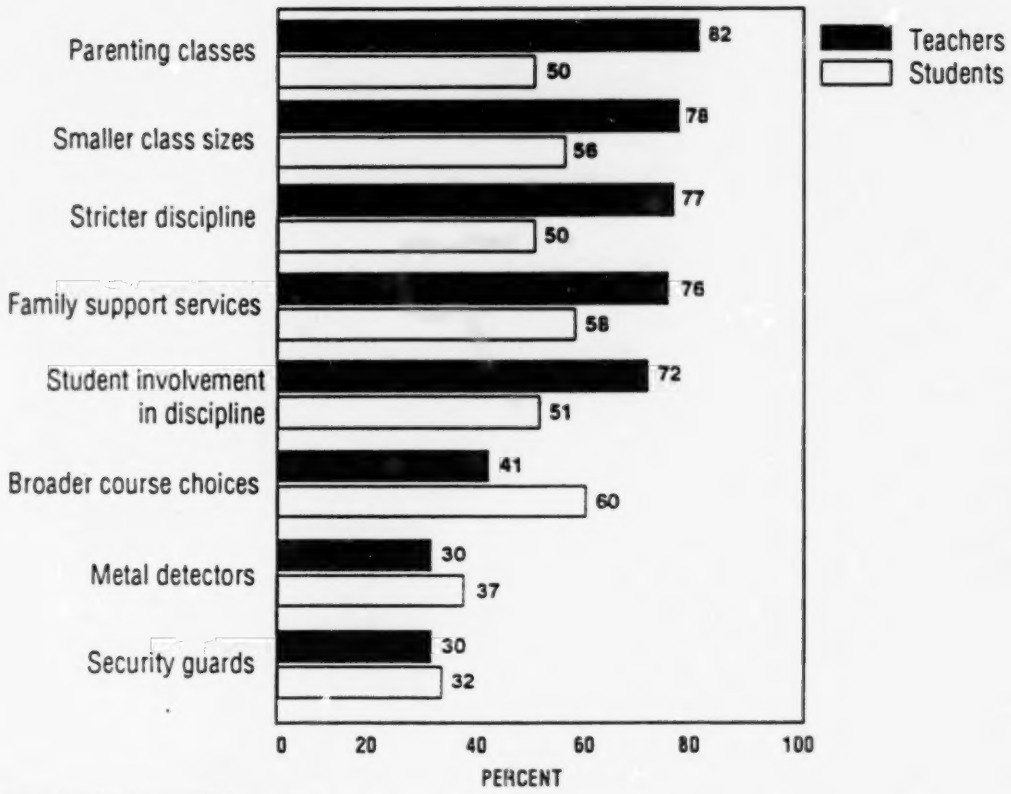
The solution most often called for by students, however, was broader class choices. Family support services was second on students' list of solutions, followed by smaller class sizes and student involvement in discipline programs.

When asked the open-ended question, "In your opinion, what would help most to reduce violence among youth, both in and out of school?", both teachers and students placed parental involvement and family support at the top of their lists.

"The home, family and school need to work together; when that happens, it's the best situation."

– Surveyed teacher

SOLUTIONS TO SCHOOL VIOLENCE



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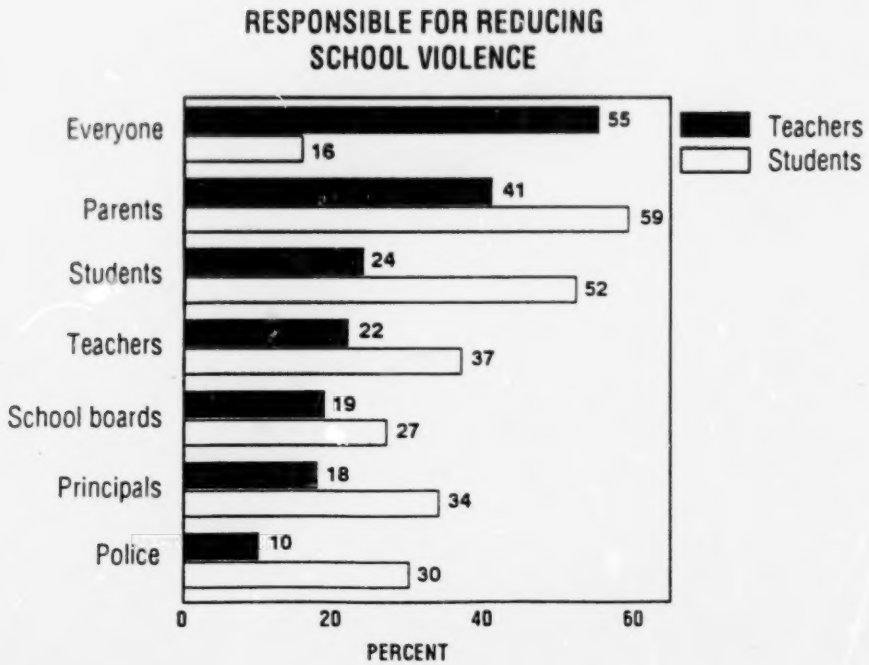
V. Responsibility for reducing violence

While most students placed the responsibility for reducing violence on the shoulders of themselves and their parents, teachers were most likely to indicated that everyone is responsible for the task. Fifty-five percent of the teachers surveyed said everyone should accept responsibility; 41 percent said it belongs to parents. For students, 59 percent said parents should be responsible; 52 percent said they themselves should be responsible.

"No one takes responsibility anymore. The parents want to hold the schools responsible. The schools want to hold parents responsible. There's no accountability."

– Surveyed teacher



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